

Fleetwood Max by ohmybgosh

Series: [this could be the place \[5\]](#)

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Summary:

One time Max stands up for Billy, and one time he returns the favor (poor Stacey)

Fleetwood Max

Author's Note:

Prompt from tumblr: "Can I get some Max and Billy bonding fics? Maybe Max standing up for Billy and vice versa?"

Yes!! You can always request Max & Billy bonding because they are my favorite duo! Hopefully this is what you were looking for!

Side note I just made up the street names in Hawkins

"Can I play a song?" Max asked. Billy grimaced.

They were driving down the highway in the dark, the sole car on the road. In the distance, city lights twinkled. Billy usually headed for those when he hit the highway, flipping off the giant "Leaving Hawkins, thanks for stopping by!" sign as he sped past.

It was dead outside - the dark of early January killed the lights around 6:00 P.M., and no one was out and about on a Sunday evening. Snow and ice coated the roads, so Billy drove slower than usual, because the thought of crashing his Camaro was too horrific. And there was nobody to outspeed, anyway.

"Go for it."

Normally Billy didn't let Max play music. But tonight was different. He felt like he owed her.

Nothing out of the ordinary had happened at the Hargrove household that night until Neil left, in fact the night had been boring, by their standards. Neil had been subdued, he grumbled about the "odd-looking" family that moved in a few doors down, but didn't criticize Billy, didn't lash out for anything. Susan made dinner while Max did her homework and Billy shovelled the driveway outside. They all sat down at the table together; Neil asked Max about school that day. Susan asked how the food was; they talked vaguely about taking Billy and Max to visit Susan's parents for winter vacation.

It was all so plain, so white-picket-fence. And it made Billy sick to think about it. It made him angry at how much of lie it was.

So he pushed, he needled. He pretended not to hear Susan when she asked how his grades were. She asked again and he said “They’re fine” into his plate.

His Dad smacked him on the back of the head. He said, “Susan asked you a question. Look at her when she’s talking to you.”

“Yes, sir.” It was almost robotic, now.

Dinner went on without any other interruption. His Dad left once his plate was clean, leaving it on the table and grabbing his coat, telling Susan he was going out to the bar with a couple of buddies from work.

Billy liked it when Neil went to the bar - if he drank enough he came home stumbling, too sleepy to find anything to fight with Billy about.

Billy gathered the dirty dishes and brought them to the sink, because Neil gave him a warning look over his shoulder as he left.

Susan was in the living room, a book on her lap. Billy thought Max had retired to her room until he heard her voice, suddenly sharp, from the direction of the couch. He reached over to turn the faucet off.

“Why don’t you ever say anything?”

“Maxine -” Susan began.

“You *never* say anything! You just let him do that; you don’t even care!” She drew in a sharp breath, a small sob escaping. “What if it was me?”

“Don’t say that!” Susan gasped.

“You don’t even care,” Max said again, quieter this time, barely a whisper but still loud enough to cut through the silence of the house, the only other sound the slow tick of the kitchen clock.

Max dashed out of the living room, eyes red rimmed but angry. She skidded to a stop in front of Billy and grabbed his hand. Billy stared at her, mouth hanging open slightly, heart pounding in his ears.

“Can we go for a drive?” She tugged his hand. “ *Please* . Now.”

“I -” He glanced over at Susan in the living room, still seated. She had the same look as Billy on her face, shocked. Except she looked tearful, too. “Is that - is that ok? We’ll be right back.”

“Just go.” Her voice sounded strained.

Now, in the car, heading down the highway, Max pulled her favorite cassette out of the glove compartment and shoved it in the player.

Max liked Fleetwood Mac - she said she liked the sweetness of Stevie’s voice. Her favorite by far was *Dreams* and she’d forward the tape until she got to it. Billy complained, wrote a metaphoric eulogy for the blissful beautiful days in sunny California before Susan bought Max the cassette.

Admittedly, though, he liked listening to Max sing. She sang loud and out of tune, but unapologetically unembarrassed, full of confidence in a way that Billy wished he was, with a bravery he didn’t quite understand. It was the kind of bravery that let Max make easy friends, the kind that let her be with Lucas when people like Billy told her not to, the kind that made her stand up to Billy in the first place.

It was the kind of bravery Billy needed, was trying to find. It would let him stand up to his dad. It would let him tell Steve Harrington how he felt. It would let him be a better person.

He waited until Max finished the song, let her turn the sound up as loud as she wanted and belt out all the words, which she knew by heart, as did he, a byproduct of letting her play it every now and then in the car and of hearing it through the wall separating their bedrooms.

Finally, when the next track started playing, he turned the music down.

“Max,” he started.

“I don’t wanna talk about it,” she snapped, reaching over to try and turn the sound back up, to tune him out.

“Hey, just listen for a damn second. Or else I’m taking this shitty tape and chucking it out the window.” He didn’t mean it. He wouldn’t do that; he might’ve before, but not now.

“I hate you,” Max huffed. She crossed her arms and sat back against the seat, glaring at him.

“I know,” Billy sighed heavily. “Just listen for a sec, ok?”

He paused, eyes leaving the road for a moment to look at Max. She still glared, but didn’t protest.

“It’s not your Mom’s fault,” He swallowed painfully, a lump rising in his throat. He didn’t like talking about this, rarely ever did.

He reached into his pocket, pulling out a cigarette and lighting it, rolling the window down, sucking in and hoping the smoke would soften the ache in his chest.

“It’s been happening for a long time,” he continued. He blew smoke steadily out through his mouth, eyes on the road, finding comfort in the familiarity of it, the burn of the cigarette between his teeth and the cold hard leather of the wheel beneath his hands. “It was like this before you guys came along. There’s nothing your Mom, or you, can do about it. And don’t ever worry it’s gonna be you next, ok? He’d never hurt you, or your Mom. It’s only me.”

“It’s not fair,” Max whispered. She looked away from him and, the car passing under a street light, her face was momentarily illuminated and he saw her eyes were wet.

He blinked, feeling his own eyes start to tear up. It wasn’t fair, especially not to Max. It wasn’t right that she be thrown into this, that she be scared.

“It is what it is,” he said after a moment, voice hoarse. “And, hey, thanks for sticking up for me. I know I’ve been a shitty brother and I

don't deserve it."

"I don't know." Max shrugged, one corner of her mouth turning up in a half smile. "You're not as big of a shithead as you used to be."

Max was strangely subdued one afternoon after school during springtime. Leaving the double doors of the middle school, giving a halfhearted wave to her friends, she walked to the car where Billy sat waiting, with her hands shoved in her pockets and her head bowed.

She got in the car slowly. She buckled and didn't say a word to Billy.

Since they'd been getting along, since he'd stopped being an asshole to her, she was full of things to say on the ride home from school. She complained about the amount of homework she got ("Wait 'til your in highschool, brat" Billy said), or she went on and on about something Mr. Clarke showed them in A.V. club, or she talked about her friends ("Lucas said this" and "Dustin said that" and so forth), or she lamented the fact that Neil and Susan didn't let her stay out past five ("Only one hour of *Dig Dug* , Billy, do you understand how much pressure that is?")

Today, though, she was silent. She stared out the passenger window, shaking her long orange hair in front of her face to hide from him. When she sniffled, as he pulled out of the school parking lot, he sighed loudly.

"What's up, Max?"

"Fuck off," she mumbled.

"Ok-ay." He drew out the two syllables. He turned onto the road, crawling along behind the other cars. Thayer Street, the main road that cut through Hawkins and led right to the high school and middle school, was always congested from 2:45 P.M. to 4:00 P.M., students and parents clamoring to get in and out of the school parking lot.

The line of cars slowed to a stop; the haggard looking crossing guard ushered a gaggle of sixth graders across the street.

Billy spotted Steve Harrington's BMW two cars ahead of him. He squinted, and saw the curly headed kid (*Dustin* , Max always reminded him when he asked) in the front seat, hands moving wildly in the air as he described something to Steve, who nodded along.

"There's your friend," Billy said, for something to say, and he winced, because he sounded stupid. It got Max to look up, though, momentarily peeking out from her orange curtain of hair. For a split second her blue eyes caught the BMW ahead, before she ducked back down. But Billy saw the tear tracks on her freckled cheeks.

His throat closed painfully. He didn't know how to deal with this; he'd been the cause of it for so long, though Max never let him see. She was strong and stubborn and Billy admired her for it.

Max sniffled again.

Billy leaned over her, pulling the glove compartment open. He rummaged around, pushing aside AC/DC and Led Zeppelin and empty cigarette cartons until he found it.

"Don't," Max said, when he pulled away, the tape held triumphantly in his hand.

He grinned at her and popped the case open, sliding the cassette into place and skipping ahead to the song.

"Billy, stop," Max groaned. She reached for the stereo and he swatted her hands away.

The cars started moving ahead and he eased down on the gas, gaining speed as they finally broke away from the school.

He found the track and turned the sound up. The symbols clanged and the drums beat. Stevie started singing.

"I'm not in the mood," Max insisted. She wiped her eyes. "Billy, turn it off."

He turned it up instead, speeding a little faster. Ahead, Steve's Beamer turned right, heading down a smaller street off the main road.

Grinning over at Max, he started singing.

"Like a heartbeat drives you mad, in the stillness of remembering."

"I'm serious, Billy, cut it out," Max said, but she had a small smile on her face and her tears were starting to dry.

"What you haaaaaaad, what you lost. C'mon Max!"

He turned the dial up, all the way, and Max belted along with him. Her voice cracked at the high parts and she was way out of tune, but it was still the best sound Billy had heard in a long time.

"Thunder only happens when it's raining! Players only love you when they're playing! Women, they will come and they will gooooooo! When the rain washes you clean you'll know, you will knooooooooow!"

"You suck." Max punched his shoulder when the song ended, still smiling.

"I know, I know." He turned off the street, into the small diner across from grocery store. Max raised her eyebrows at him.

"We're supposed to be home by five."

"It's barely three, we've got time. D'you want a milkshake or not?"

Max's eyes lit up.

Later, sitting across from each other in the best booth, the one beside the big window where they could watch people walk about outside, they slurped their milkshakes, both chocolate. A large basket of french fries sat in between them.

Back in California, when Max and Susan had first moved in, Billy took Max to the best hamburger place by the beach every Friday after school. Back then, he wasn't as pissed off at the world as he had been; his Dad seemed happier and hadn't been violent the first few

months Susan and Max came along.

They got to know each other over giant chocolate milkshakes, cold glasses that sweated and glimmered in the bright California sun. They agreed that chocolate, a classic, was by far the best flavor, and that whipped cream was overrated, and that dipping a hot crispy french fry into an icy milkshake was the greatest invention since sliced bread. They people watched, made fun of the sunburned tourists and the leathery old ladies with their tiny rat-like dogs. They talked about *Star Wars* and Max told Billy about her favorite arcade games, and sometimes, when she let her guard down, she talked about her parents getting divorced. Billy never told her about his Mom, couldn't talk about her still, but he had a feeling Max knew about what happened, anyway.

They fell out of that friendliness, the bond they had of being thrown into a new family. But they were starting to get it back, slowly.

Billy dipped a fry into the shake, plopping it in his mouth. He watched a couple of high school freshmen pass by, crossing the street and heading into the movie theater.

"So what happened at school today?" He took a long sip of the milkshake, raising his eyebrows at Max across the table.

She looked away, picked at her nails.

"C'mon, Max, what's up?" He picked up a french fry and tossed it at her. It landed in her hair and she shook it out.

"Don't do that," she snapped.

"Tell me what happened, or the next one's going in your nose." He picked up another fry and waved it at her. "Think I can make it from here?"

"You're such a shithead," Max said, but it was light, with a sly smile. She stole the fry out of his hand and shoved it in her mouth.

"We can play this game all day," Billy said, in mock seriousness.

Max rolled her eyes at him, swallowing the fry and slurping her

milkshake. After a moment she sighed, wiping her mouth with her napkin.

“There’s just this mean girl at school,” she said quietly. She looked down at her lap, scuffing her shoes against the floor under the table.

Billy narrowed his eyes. “She’s mean to you?”

“She’s mean to everyone,” Max said, shrugging it off. Her eyes looked red again, though.

“But she did something to you at school today?” Billy pressed. He could feel his face starting to flush in anger.

“She called me a dyke,” Max whispered, sinking low in the booth, blinking rapidly at the floor.

Billy sucked in a slow breath, clenched his fists at his sides. “What’s her name?”

The following morning he followed Max into school. She kept eyeing him suspiciously, because they usually parted ways in the parking lot and met up at the same spot after the bell rang, but he waved her off, mentioning something vague about needing to get a form from the office.

She spotted her gang in the hallway, Lucas and Dustin and the mini Wheeler and the mini Byers, tossed a “see you later!” over her shoulder at him, and dashed off to them. She ushered her into the nearest classroom, which must be Mr. Clarke’s, Billy thought, and immediately put their heads together, talking in hushed voices.

He shook his head, smiling slightly, and turned away. He loitered about by the office, flashing a dazzling smile at the secretary who watched him warily from the glass window. When the morning bell finally rang he waited a moment longer, until all the middle schoolers dashed into their classrooms, until the secretary turned around to answer the phone. He quietly slipped into the boy’s bathroom, completely deserted.

He grinned, kicked open a stall door, took the black sharpie out of his pocket and started writing.

He was late to Pre-Calc that morning but didn't care, it was worth it.

It was even more worth it at the end of the day, when Max came skipping toward the Camaro, a wide grin on her face.

"You'll never guess what happened today," she gushed as soon as she slid in the passenger seat. She plowed on, before Billy could pretend to look surprised. "Someone wrote 'Stacey waxes her mustache' in the boy's bathroom today! I didn't see it but Dustin told me there was even a little drawing of her with a mustache, I can't believe it. The whole school is talking about it. Her face was priceless!"

"No kidding," Billy smirked.

Max went on, telling him about the time Stacey was mean to one of her friends at the winter dance, and how red her face was when at lunch some kid named Tony asked her how her beard was coming in.

He nodded along, half listening, starting the car and smiling to himself. He felt good that afternoon.

And when he looked up, shifting into drive to pull out of the parking lot, Steve Harrington was walking by, Dustin Henderson and the little Byers kid jogging at his side, talking excitedly about the Stacey incident, no doubt.

When Steve glanced his way, their eyes meeting for a second, he gave Billy a small smile.

And that was just the icing on the cake.